

Measure of Excellence

"The secret of joy in work is contained in one word – excellence. To know how to do something well is to enjoy it." —Pearl Buck

By Mari Serebrov

With family and consumer science teachers leading the way, a growing number of Arkansas' career and technical education teachers are demonstrating their excellence – and their enjoyment – in their work by earning their National Board Certification.

The highest credential in the teaching profession, the national certification is a time-consuming, extensive effort that says: "This teacher is highly qualified."

Patricia Stinson is the third FACS teacher in the Nashville School District to be certified. "Our administrators demand such a level of excellence in our students that we as teachers feel the need to set the example," she says.

Tammy Elliott, who teaches family and consumer sciences at Nashville Junior High, was the first CTE teacher in the state to set that example in 2000. She was quickly followed by Fran Strawn, a FACS teacher at Nashville Senior High.

Stinson says the fact that her colleagues had their certification motivated her – that, and the support of administration.

Becoming certified by the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards isn't easy. To qualify, teachers must have at least three years of classroom experience. The first step toward certification is assembling a portfolio, which could take up to 400 hours of effort.

Stinson says the portfolio included video demonstrations of her teaching and of her students doing group problem-solving ac-

tivities. She also had to track the progress of two students with different learning styles to show how she addressed their needs. Another part of the portfolio was listing workshops she had attended and showing how she applied what she had learned to the classroom.

It took a year for Stinson to assemble the portfolio. The second step was taking an extensive assessment this past summer.

"Then you nervously wait from June to November to learn your score," she says. Teachers have to score at least 275 on the assessment. The renewable certification is good for 10 years.

All the hard work was worth it. She "gained confidence and recognition from my peers," she says. "I'm not just a little home ec teacher. I now realize that in my teaching I have gained national merit."

Her students also benefited. Stinson says she is more aware of their learning styles and cultural issues. Instead of just teaching out of the book, she adds more hands-on activities and strives to promote leadership.

In many districts, the academic teachers are the ones going through the laborious certification process, but a growing number of CTE teachers are joining their ranks. Stinson thinks it is an important achievement for CTE teachers.

"We prepare students for the real world," she says.

John Davidson, deputy director for CTE at the Department of Workforce Education, agrees. "The National Board Certification



program validates the quality teachers we have in our state," he says. "The number of FACS teachers getting their certification shows everyone in the state how proud we should be of the excellence in our CTE courses."

Statewide, Stinson was one of 204 Arkansas elementary and secondary teachers earning certification this past year. Altogether, 583 Arkansas teachers have been certified since the program began. The state ranks 17th in the nation in its number of certified teachers.

While not required by the No Child Left Behind Act, certification does establish a teacher as highly qualified – one of the crucial elements of the federal act. "CTE teachers are not required to have highly qualified status under NCLB," Davidson says, but the credential goes a long way in proving how important CTE is to a student's future.

"We are proud of our teachers who are certified or who are going through the process now," John Wyvill, DWE director, says. "Their certification speaks highly of Arkansas teachers as a whole and demonstrates our commitment to both rigor and relevance in the classroom."